

Application No. 10/707,526
Docket No. A3-1700
Amendment dated February 22, 2007
Reply to Office Action of January 22, 2007

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Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (Canceled):

Claim 2 (Withdrawn-currently amended): The method according to claim 8, ~~claim 1~~, wherein the cutting means comprises multiple stationary blades disposed in the cutting plane and joined together at a point aligned with the predetermined location within the cross-section of the feed passage, the method further comprising the step of making approximately longitudinal cuts through the food products with the multiple stationary blades.

Claim 3 (Withdrawn-currently amended): The method according to claim 8, ~~claim 1~~, wherein the cutting means comprises a cutting wheel rotating in the cutting plane, the method further comprising the step of making transverse cuts through the food products with the cutting wheel as the cutting wheel rotates.

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Claim 4 (Withdrawn-currently amended): The method according to ~~claim 8, claim 1,~~ wherein the cutting means comprises:

multiple stationary blades disposed in the cutting plane and joined together at a point aligned with the predetermined location within the cross-section of the feed passage, wherein the delivering step comprises the multiple stationary blades making substantially longitudinal cuts through the food products; and

a cutting wheel rotating in a plane beneath the multiple stationary blades, wherein the delivering step further comprises the cutting wheel making transverse cuts through the food products.

Claim 5 (Withdrawn): The method according to claim 4, further comprising the step of disposing the cutting wheel from the multiple stationary blades a distance of at least equal to a diameter of the food products.

Claim 6 (Canceled): The method according to claim 1, wherein the contacting and positioning step comprises contacting only the outer peripheries of the food products as the food products free-fall through the feed passage.

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Claim 7 (Canceled): The method according to claim 1, wherein the feed-passage and the path therein are oriented substantially vertically so that the food products free-fall substantially vertically.

Claim 8 (Currently amended): A method of cutting food product, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a cutting means comprising at least one cutting element disposed in a cutting plane that is not vertical;

individually delivering food products to the cutting means by causing the food products to free-fall through a feed passage and then free-fall through the cutting means entirely under the force of gravity and on a path that is approximately normal to the cutting plane; and

contacting the food products and positioning the food products so that they free-fall on the path at a predetermined location within a cross-section of the feed passage as the food products free-fall through the feed passage and prior to encountering the cutting means so as to produce size-reduced products of substantially consistent size and shape; ~~The method according to claim 1,~~

wherein the contacting and positioning step comprises contacting and positioning the food products with a plurality of resilient members extending radially inward into the feed passage toward a central axis thereof.

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Claim 9 (Previously presented): The method according to claim 8, wherein the resilient members are uniformly distributed along an inner perimeter of the feed passage so as to center the food products passing therethrough at the central axis of the feed passage.

Claim 10 (Withdrawn-currently amended): The method according to claim 8, ~~claim 1~~, wherein the feed passage and the path therein are inclined from vertical so that the free-fall of the food products is also inclined from vertical.

Claim 11 (Withdrawn): The method according to claim 10, wherein the feed passage and the path therein are oriented at an angle of about 30 degrees from vertical so that the free-fall of the food products is also at an angle of about 30 degrees from vertical.

Claim 12 (Withdrawn): The method according to claim 10, further comprising the step of forming the feed passage to have a planar surface.

Claim 13 (Withdrawn): The method according to claim 12, wherein the contacting and positioning step comprises orienting the feed passage so

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that gravity causes a planar surface of each of the food products to contact the planar surface of the feed passage as the food products pass through the feed passage.

Claim 14 (Previously presented): A method of cutting food product, the method comprising the steps of:

individually delivering food products to a cutting means comprising at least one cutting element disposed in a cutting plane that is not vertical by causing the food products to free-fall through a feed passage and then free-fall through the cutting means entirely under the force of gravity and on a path that is approximately normal to the cutting plane; and

contacting the food products and positioning the food products with a plurality of resilient members extending radially inward into the feed passage toward a central axis thereof, the resilient members causing the food products to free-fall on the path at a predetermined location within a cross-section of the feed passage as the food products free-fall through the feed passage and prior to encountering the cutting means so as to produce size-reduced products of substantially consistent size and shape.

Claim 15 (Withdrawn): The method according to claim 14, wherein

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the cutting means comprises multiple stationary blades disposed in the cutting plane and joined together at a point aligned with the predetermined location within the cross-section of the feed passage, the method further comprising the step of making approximately longitudinal cuts through the food products with the multiple stationary blades.

Claim 16 (Withdrawn): The method according to claim 14, wherein the cutting means comprises a cutting wheel rotating in the cutting plane, the method further comprising the step of making transverse cuts through the food products with the cutting wheel as the cutting wheel rotates.

Claim 17 (Withdrawn): The method according to claim 14, wherein the cutting means comprises multiple stationary blades disposed in the cutting plane and joined together at a point aligned with the predetermined location within the cross-section of the feed passage, and a cutting wheel rotating in a plane beneath the multiple stationary blades, the method further comprising the steps of cutting the food products in a longitudinal direction with the multiple stationary blades and then cutting the food products in a transverse direction with the cutting wheel, the food products passing completely through the multiple stationary blades before engaging the cutting wheel.

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Claim 18 (Original): The method according to claim 14, wherein only
~~the outer peripheries of the food products are contacted as the food products~~
free-fall through the feed passage.

Claim 19 (Original): The method according to claim 14, wherein the
feed passage and the path therein are oriented substantially vertically and the
contacting and positioning step comprises centering the food products at a
central axis of the feed passage.

Claim 20 (Withdrawn): The method according to claim 14, wherein
the feed passage and the path therein are inclined from vertical, and the feed
passage has a planar surface that contacts a planar surface of each of the
food products under the force of gravity as the food products pass through the
feed passage.